

# THE STORY

Adult Sunday School Lesson Guide

Chapter 24  
No Ordinary Man

**Timeless Truth: Neutrality is not an option - Jesus demands a response.**

## Teacher's Background Notes

Jesus never shied away from controversy. As His ministry grew, so did His opposition. It is in light of this conflict that the gospels must be viewed. For many readers, the gospels seem to be a string of unrelated sections of teachings and random events. They have usually been taught as individual stories that are divorced from their greater context. In addition, the amount of Old Testament material referenced in each gospel is massive. But many Christians today are so unfamiliar with the Old Testament that these references are either missed or ignored. Yet the authors included these references to indicate that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the reference and thereby validate Jesus as the Christ. So it is incumbent upon us to help guide our students to see that the material that each author included was not selected randomly. Together they form a coherent whole that communicates a specific message.

The OT message anticipated a coming age where full righteousness would be revealed in the Messiah. Their history and their prophets proved over and over again their inability to be a righteous nation and fulfill their role as the instrument to draw all nations to the LORD (Gen. 12:1-3). Moses indicated that an exile, return and change in heart were required in Israel's future (Deut. 30:1-6). During the exile, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophetically anticipated this new heart would come with a new covenant (Jer. 31, Ezek. 36). The exile itself was anticipated by Moses who warned that covenant disobedience would bring this about. Israel was to exercise God's benevolent rule over all the nations (Deut. 15:6). She could expect to do so as long as she represented God by living righteously under the Law (Deut. 28:13). However, God promised that her disobedience would result in being *ruled over* by Gentiles (Deut. 28:44). Therefore, when they heard the message to "repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand," John and Jesus reminded them of the covenants and the need to return to YHWH. If she would return to the LORD to obey Him with all her heart, she would find compassion and restoration (Deut. 30:1-10). As long as Israel was under Gentile rule, she should know that she was living outside of covenant obedience. What an offensive message this was to the self-righteous Pharisees whose pride was rooted in their strict adherence to the Law. This return in Deut. 30 is the basis for the prodigal son parable. The Pharisees were the intended audience of this parable and they would have made no mistake in hearing the message of Moses that they needed a change in heart.

The Pharisees remained steadfast in their own righteousness. Jesus' message was that He offered full righteousness imputed to any believer by faith—including those repulsive sinners and tax collectors. This clashed with their version of the kingdom of

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God where only the righteous like themselves would be welcome. The Isaiah quotation (p. 277) pointed the self-righteous unbelievers back to the era of “blindness” and “deafness” that led to their exile. Not coincidentally, Isaiah had the largest volume of Messianic prophecy; thus Jesus was reminding them that He was Isaiah’s Servant. Jesus was under the Law of Deut. 13:1-5, the test of a false prophet. He had to act perfectly within the bounds of the Word of God or he was to be rejected as authentic regardless of his signs and wonders. But if Jesus’ message aligned with the Word of God, was authenticated by wonders, and was rejected anyway, then the unbelievers would be judged for rejecting God Himself (Deut. 18:15-22). His message and miracles validated Jesus as the anticipated Prophet greater than Moses or Elijah.

This lesson plan offers two very different options. The first option aims to develop your learners’ Bible study skills by introducing them to the valuable tool of a chart. This instrument should help them analyze the four miracles as a coherent whole that builds to a climax instead of random and independent events. I included a completed chart as an aid to your preparation. Remind learners that Jesus was not asking people to believe in Him because of the miracles, for that is why He often told witnesses to remain quiet. Jesus asked people to believe in His message of faith in Him for righteousness. Like He said at the beginning of His “bread from heaven” discourse, Jesus desired people come to the Master’s table for the Master rather than for what is on His table, as Hank Hanegraaff so eloquently states. The message and the miracles cannot be divorced one from the other. This lesson is particularly helpful for your visual learners who need to see the big picture.

Lesson option two is designed to spark a fresh appreciation for the extraordinary, life-changing experiences that first century encounters with Jesus produced. In so doing, these characters come to life. Their humanity resonates with our own. This then begs the questions, “Does my encounter with Jesus result in life change? Does my experience with Jesus result in humble joy that requires me to share?” This lesson targets your kinesthetic learners who rarely have the opportunity to learn through their primary preferred modality. First person soliloquies always evoke an emotive response that a third person approach never will. This lesson will help students develop better Bible study skills by requiring them to study a character slowly and intentionally, thoughtfully considering the sum of the character’s experience. Both lessons are designed to add variety to your classroom experience.

## Lesson Plan 1: Jesus’ Authority: His Teaching and His Tests

Jesus preached the gospel of God, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mk. 1:14-15) As people watched and listened to Jesus, they responded, “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” (Mk. 1:27) No one could argue that Jesus was a controversial figure. From the beginning, He opposed and exposed the religious establishment who despised Him. He shattered Jewish paradigms by declaring that relationship to God is based on faith and obedience rather than flesh and blood (Mk. 3:35, Jn. 8:39). He challenged the crowds to make a decision about Him. He even confounded His closest disciples. As we study the gospels, we find ourselves digging through Jesus’ teachings and in wonder of His miracles. Many times we have been taught or studied these gospel stories in small bites



because the big picture is hard to grasp. But Jesus' message and His miracles are not independent of one another. His miracles do not prove that He is anything more than a great prophet or even a false one (Deut. 13:1-3).

Moses and Elijah worked great wonders too. Even Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the first three plagues that Moses did. The key is the combination of words and works, the message and the miracles. Moses himself taught Israel that a wonder-worker whose words betrayed his God was not to be followed (Deut. 13:1-3). But Israel should look for a prophet like Moses. This Prophet must be listened to for He would speak God's words (Deut. 18:15-19). Moses warned that those who refuse to listen to this unique Prophet would be judged for rejecting God (Deut. 18:19). It is within this context that Jesus' message and miracles must be understood. His miracles *authenticate* His message. That is the situation we find in Mark 4-5. This lesson aims to help us understand the relationship between Jesus' teaching and His tests, and it aims to help us develop better Bible study skills so that we can better comprehend what Jesus did, why He did it, and what is the message of the gospel writer.

#### I. **Jesus taught...** (Mark 4:1-34)

##### **The parables**

- A. Much of Jesus' teaching was in parables. Parables are short stories that draw comparisons to spiritual truth. These stories come from common experiences that the original hearers would have easily understood—farming, shepherding, kings, banquets, and commercial elements such as money, debts and builders. There are at least 35 parables in the synthesized gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. All of His parables teach something about Himself, about His kingdom or about His followers.
- B. In Mark 4:1-34, or p. 277-278, Jesus taught a large crowd by the lake, so large that He actually had to get into a boat in order to teach them many things in parables. He urged them to listen carefully, presumably because He expected a response afterwards. Jesus' teachings were never haphazard or random. They always served a purpose that contributed to His overall mission.
- C. Parable of the Soils—He described the various soils upon which the farmer scattered his seeds. Not all the seeds produced a harvest. Some were scattered and eaten up by birds. Some sprouted quickly and were scorched and withered. Others were choked out. But some fell on good soil and produced an amazing bounty. Jesus provided an explanation to His disciples privately explaining that the farmer sows the word and the soils represent the various responses of the hearers of the word. And what is the word? Mark 1:14-15—the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel! This parable explains why so many Jews rejected Jesus. It reveals God's gracious and universal offer of salvation as preached by Jesus alongside the mixed responses and results. The truth is timeless—people today reject Jesus for the very same reasons.



D. Every teaching of Jesus anticipates a response. He had expectations that hearers would respond to His teaching either by faith or rejection. And indeed they did. Because He understood the eternal gravity of His teaching and peoples' responses, He encouraged everyone to listen carefully.

### **The purpose**

#### **A. To reveal**

1. To those who believe, Jesus revealed the “secret of the kingdom of God,” that is in Christ Jesus. God’s kingdom or rule was taking on a new form. While scholars may debate what exactly is that form, there can be no arguing that Jesus’ assertion of the change in the kingdom was a “secret” or “mystery,” which means it was not previously revealed. God allowed His believers to see in Jesus this secret, for they too would become “farmers” or “sowers” of the seed. Those who heard and believed would receive more reason to believe in Jesus, while those who were in unbelief would continue in their unbelief.
2. Nevertheless, even these believing disciples struggled to understand Jesus’ parables. While the stories are simple, the spiritual truths that they teach are not. They are quite deep and require thoughtful consideration.

#### **B. To conceal**

1. This idea is difficult for us to understand. Why would Jesus deliberately conceal His teaching? But by understanding His Isaiah reference, we are enlightened to this concealment. At the time Isaiah prophesied, Israel was given the word of God to repent and return to the LORD. They were spiritually blind and deaf. In spite of all the words of the many prophets, they refused to really “hear.”
2. Jesus is saying that the people of His day were like the Israelites of Isaiah’s day—spiritually blind and deaf. They were not denied the possibility of understanding and believing in Him. But they persevered in closing their minds of His message and continued in their rejection.

## **II. Jesus tested.** (Mark 4:35-5:43; *The Story*, p.283-286)

A. While *The Story* has inserted material from the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark’s account is continuous. Jesus followed His teaching that day with miracles. These two chapters are one continuous story and one continuous message. These Lower Story truths also convey Upper Story truths. But the sheer volume of material of these four “tests” makes it difficult to apprehend the big picture. Gospel writer John tells us that the works of Jesus were so numerous that all the books in the world could not contain them (Jn. 21:25). Therefore the good Bible student must ask himself or herself why were these particular events selected to be written down. An analysis of the four miracles will help to answer that question. A chart is an excellent Bible study tool. It helps us organize material so that we can take a big picture view of it to discern its meaning.



- B. These miracles serve as tests for what Jesus has already taught. He just explained that on good soil, the words are heard, accepted and fruitful. This is not new. God tested Abraham with Isaac AFTER He had promised Abe a seed. God tested Israel in the dessert AFTER He had spoken to them and demonstrated His power in such a grandiose deliverance. Now, Jesus authenticated His teaching by demonstrations of His authority.

*At this point, you may choose to work together as a class to fill in the chart at the end of this lesson plan or you might allow your students to work in small groups independently of your guidance. A completed chart is attached to assist you in guiding your students. A chart is a good tool to guide the process of turning students back to the Biblical text.*

1. **People:** Who is involved? Is there a connection between the people involved and the sphere in which the miracle occurred?
  2. **Method:** What method did Jesus use to carry out the miracle?
  3. **Sphere:** What sphere(s) was involved in the problem and the miracle? Was it a physical problem? Emotional? Or spiritual? Was it a combination thereof?
  4. **Result:** This is a Lower Story category. This looks at the details of the Lower Story event. What was the result of Jesus' actions? Could the result be explained in another non-miraculous way?
  5. **Faith:** What elements of faith show up in the people involved in this story?
  6. **Authority:** This is the Upper Story category. It gives us insight into the bigger picture and helps convey the author's reason for including the Lower Story event. Over what does Jesus demonstrate His authority?
- C. After filling out the chart, we can see horizontally that these elements or categories help us break down each individual story into manageable parts. Vertically, we can use it to maximize our study time as it helps us draw conclusions. Is there an increase in intensity in the problems? In the miracles? In the faith response? In authority? Is there a message that these trends help communicate?
- D. Application questions to gain from this exercise: What practical issues do these passages deal with? Which person's faith response is most like my own? Is there a change required of me from this lesson? Can I better trust Jesus because of these things, and if so, why?

### III. Applications

- A. I can develop better Bible study skills so that I can mature in my faith.
- B. Like the original hearers, I must consider Jesus' message and miracles and make a decision to believe. Jesus is expecting a response of faith.
- C. I can trust Jesus in the midst of my storms—emotional or physical.
- D. Jesus is sovereign over the natural world. Even the worst of storms has been filtered through His hand.



- E. Jesus is sovereign over the supernatural world of demonic forces. I can trust Him to protect me.
- F. Jesus is sovereign over sickness and death. I can know for certain that He *can* heal but there is no promise that He *will* heal. While He raised Jairus' daughter, He allowed John to remain dead.
- G. I can trust that Jesus is who He says He is because He has authenticated His message with miracles.
- H. Like Jairus, I can cling to Jesus even when the Lower Story appears hopeless. When it is hopeless, I need to cling even more to the only One who holds the power of life and death.
- I. Like the woman, I should seek Jesus in my desperate times.
- J. Like the disciples, I may now "get it" all the time, but as I continue to follow Jesus and know Him more and more, my faith and understanding will continue to grow.
- K. Like the farmer, most of the seeds I sow will not be fruitful. But God is in charge of the harvest and has entrusted me with the task of sowing.

## Lesson Plan 2: "My Story with Jesus" Monologues

This chapter in *The Story* lends itself nicely to monologues about various characters' experiences with Jesus. While many of our Old Testament stories may have been unfamiliar to our students, many of the gospel stories have become familiar and perhaps even seem lackluster now. We have the benefit of the whole sum of Scripture. We know how God's story eventually ends. Most of your students already know how Jesus' story ends with His death, burial and resurrection. But as this chapter in *The Story* reminds us, those who experienced Jesus in His first coming did not have the whole picture. They did not know for sure what to make of this man, His message and His miracles. Even those disciples closest to Him were slow to grasp this Jesus. And not everyone liked Him. The goal of this lesson is to transform the flat characters from the pages of a book into 3-dimensional people who really *experienced* Jesus and thereby create fresh awe for the God-man Jesus through their eyewitness accounts.

Identify a drama team a week or two in advance. Assign them various characters (suggested below) and provide them with Scriptures to study (provided below) so that they may fully develop each character. Encourage your actors to delve into the life of their character, the cultural background and his or her desperation or astonishment. The more time you give your team to develop their characters, the more effective their monologues will be at communicating the scandal that was Jesus. **HOWEVER**, an alternative to prepared monologues would be extemporaneous monologues. For the best extemporaneous monologues, give each table a different character and corresponding Scriptures to study for fifteen to twenty minutes. Then call for a volunteer from that table to present the extemporaneous monologue to the class.

Benefits to this lesson are:

- Active learning is retained far better than is passive learning.
- Your class enjoys seeing new faces up front.



- The drama team further develops their Bible study skills.
- The learners begin to envision themselves as part of God’s story through immersion into the humanity of various characters.
- Your kinesthetic learners have an opportunity to learn through their preferred modality.
- Learners rekindle an appreciation for Jesus, evoking a response of deeper faith.
- Learners synthesize the characters’ experiences to form a more comprehensive and thoughtful understanding of who is Jesus.

<b>Peter</b>	<b>The Demoniac</b>	<b>Jairus</b>	<b>Bleeding Woman</b>
p. 283-284, Mk 4:35-41 Matt. 8:23-27 Lu 8:22-25 Ps. 89:8-9 Ps. 104:5-9 Ps. 106:8-9 Ps. 107:23-32 p. 285-286 Mk. 5:37 p. 287-288 p. 288, Matt. 14:22-33	p. 284-285, Mk. 1:1-20 Matt. 8:28-34 Lu. 8:26-39  The pig herdsman	p. 285-286, Mk. 5:21-42 Matt. 9:18-26 Lu. 8:40-56	p. 285-286, Mk. 5:21-42 Matt. 9:18-26 Lu. 8:40-56 Lev. 15:25-30 Mk. 3:32-35

### Learning activity: Discussion

After the monologues, learners can discuss the experiences of each character. Some guided questions are below:

- What motivated various characters to come to Jesus?
- Who did each character understand Jesus to be?
- How did these characters’ lives and faith change as a result of their encounter with Jesus?
- If you had witnessed any one of these events, how do you suppose you might have responded to Jesus?
- What motivates people today to come to Jesus?



Mark 4:35-5:42

Miracle	People	Method	Sphere	Result	Faith	Authority
Calming the Storm						
The Demon-possessed Man						
Woman with the Bleeding						
Jairus' Daughter						



## Mark 4:35-5:42

Miracle	People	Method	Sphere	Result	Faith	Authority
<b>Calming the Storm</b>	Jesus Disciples (fisherman used to storms)	Spoken word	Physical	Perfectly calm waters	What faith? None Fearful	Over the natural world
<b>The Demon-possessed Man</b>	Man Jesus Pig herder Townsppeople	Spoken word	Mental Spiritual	Man became normal (right mind), clothed,	Man wanted to follow Jesus, People fearful and reject, care more about \$ of pigs than man	Over the supernatural realm, ruinous kingdom of Satan--death and destruction
<b>Woman with the Bleeding</b>	Woman Jesus Disciples	Touch	Physical Emotional (unclean outcast) Lev. 15:25-30	Instant healing	Her faith healed her in that it caused her to seek Jesus	Over sickness
<b>Jairus' Daughter</b>	Jairus Daughter Wife 3 Disciples Mourners Jesus	Spoken word and touch	Physical Emotional Spiritual	Instantly revived, stood, walked and ate	Jairus' faith in 2 stages, showed great faith	Over death—the climax of the set of miracles

